DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 055 296 CG 006 671

AUTHOR Beal, Rubye M.
TITLE Open Admissions in the Community Junior College.
INSTITUTION Santa Fe Junior Coll., Gainesville, Fla.
PUB DATE Apr 71
NOTE 11p.; Paper presented at American Personnel and Guidance Association Convention, Atlantic City, N. J., April 4-8, 1971

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS *College Admission; *Community Colleges; *Junior Colleges; *Junior College Students; *Open Enrollment; Programs

ABSTRACT

The public community junior college is the one institution of higher education that purports to serve all of the people all of the time. Characterized by an open admission policy, these colleges accept all students who can profit from an educational experience. Community colleges are attempting to provide creative ways of humanizing the educational process. Some of these innovative approaches are (1) removal of a punitive grading system; (2) removal of psychological and physical barriers to education; (3) provision for individual progress according to the individual's time schedule; (4) provision of positive programs and exciting learning experiences; (5) planned strength bombardment and focus upon development of individual potential; (6) provision of well-prepared student personnel workers; (7) provision of well-prepared, creative teachers committed to the junior college philosophy; and (8) meaningful involvement of students in the real life of the college -- e.g., in curriculum decisions, community involvement, and teacher evaluation. (Author)

ED055296

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL OFFICE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY.

OPEN ADMISSIONS IN THE COMMUNITY JUNIOR COLLEGE

Rubye M. Beal

The community junior college, a distinctly American educational institution, has from its inception been characterized by an open admission policy. Born in this century in response to social pressures for equalizing opportunities for higher education for all citizens, these institutions have become a genuine "people's college". Their growth has been phenomenal. In 1969 more students entered as freshmen in the two-year colleges than in the four-year colleges. With an open door beckoning to all, approximately 3½ to 4½ million students will enroll in these institutions by 1975 regardless of past academic achievement, sex, race, age, or economic status.

The student population is representative of every segment of society--recent high school graducates and drop-outs, young adults with aspirations awakened, middle-aged men and women seeking a second career or up-grading of present job skills, the university bound, the work directed, the disoriented, the disadvantaged, the semi-literate, and the intellectually gifted. All people from all walks of life meet, make contact as persons and meld.

While it can clearly be stated that all community junior colleges are open admissions colleges, it is true that different institutions may vary as to interpretation of this policy. While all accept students who graduated from high school or who obtained a general equivalency diploma, some institutions allow any person to matriculate regardless of previous institutionalized academic background. Other institutions, while open door, prescribe specific curriculums for students scoring below selected cut-off points on tests administered before admission to the college. There is no standardized procedure for implementing the open door policy, but all community colleges are characteristically open to all who may profit from an educational experience.

CG 006 671

Because the question of admission criteria for community colleges is an accepted fact and is not open to debate, I wish to use the time we have together to share with you some of the problems and tentative answers we have found in implementing the open admission policy. Accepting all students who apply for admission to a college requires changes in the traditional educational approach. Many of these changes topple long-cherished educational tradition, but are necessary if our open door is not to become a revolving door. The following are some of the innovative approaches currently being explored in some of the nation's community colleges in this effort to provide higher educational opportunities for all.

I. Many community colleges are eliminating a punitive grading system.

Community colleges claim to be student centered institutions dedicated to the success of each student. Yet, for those who continue to maintain a punitive grading system of "A", "B", "C", "D", "F", failure is guaranteed. The system not only provides for failure, it guarantees it. These grades have traditionally been used because they are supposedly standard. But, we all know that an "A" at Yale may not be the same as an "A" from another institution. We know that an "A" from one teacher is not the same as an "A" from another. Within universities, different colleges grade differently, different departments grade differently within a college. Where is the universal language?

When a student is given an "F", he must wear the "F" forever. It's his scarlet letter, his punishment for not studying hard enough, or for not meeting our time schedule, or for having personal or physical problems during a given period of time. He is never forgiven, although we are quite

free with our forgiveness in almost all other areas of life. Further, if he gets too many "F's" he is suspended or placed on probation. This is as ridiculous as if hospitals were to discharge the sick and keep the healthy.

Many colleges across the nation are abandoning this outmoded system and have developed grading systems that abandon the "F". Variations include "A", "B", "C", and sometimes "X" or "W" to indicate failure to reach minimum standards within a certain time period. Santa Fe Junior College, my own institution, restricts its grading to "A", "B", and "C", believing that it is more important to know the points at which a student succeeds, than the points at which a student cannot succeed. An "X" serves as a place holder to indicate that at this point in time a student has not yet met minimum competencies in a particular course or courses.

Educators have long espoused individual differences and individual learning rates. We know people learn at different rates. Yet, institutions have demanded that every student meet the same time schedule of semester, quarter, or trimester, or suffer the consequences of receiving the damaging "F" grade. In an open admissions institution, it is imperative that students be allowed to proceed at their own rate without receiving the punishment usually given. The race is not always won by the swiftest.

II. Community colleges are attempting to remove psychological and physical barriers to education.

Combs, Rogers, Maslow, Kelly and others have all written about threat and the effects of threat on learning. Each state that threat occurs when an individual does not feel that he is adequate to cope with any given situation. He sees no way to meet his needs and his vision becomes

narrowed to the situation that threatens. As his vision is narrowed, so is his learning and behavior under threat becomes rigid and defensive. As educators this kind of behavior is the exact opposite of what we hope to see in our students. Our world today demands independent, thinking people who are free to examine alternatives for action and are able to differentiate and choose healthly patterns of behavior for themselves.

Educators, primarily through tradition, have developed a whole series of threatening situations or psychological barriers that greatly hinder a student's move toward self-development. In many colleges students are administered a test battery before they are ever allowed to enter classes. Most students have been tested many times in their lives and never seem particularly shocked at the scores they receive. For those who score low it just proves what they already know, I can't take tests or I am dumber than other people. We expose their inadequacies of which they are already painfully aware, and even if used only for placement it is an anxiety producing, threatening experience. We are labeling and diagnosing on one bit of behavior rather than recognizing and utilizing the multi-faceted talents of each human being. There are no zeros in human nature and the best tests available today still only measure intellectual capacities and skills narrowly defined. Further, it is widely accepted that tests have very little utility in predicting the performance of individuals. In the best of circumstances the use of tests permits us to account for only 25 per cent to 40 per cent of the variance in overall grade point average, and considerably less in specific courses or fields.

In considering the physical barriers to education a recent study concluded that although significant progress has been made in providing assessable higher education to 2/5's of the nation's population, it is

sobering to realize that the educational opportunities of 3/5's of the population is inhibited by the simple fact that they do not happen to live near an assessable college. This figure, of course, varies from state to state across the nation.

III. Community colleges are providing positive programs and exciting learning experiences.

Because of the community college open door admissions policy, any given institution enrolls a highly hetergeneous student body with as many different needs as there are individuals. To meet these varying needs, academic and vocational offerings must be all inclusive, but beyond this the college must be a student-supportive institution. Each student must be cherished as a person of worth, and must be assisted in finding a program in which he can succeed.

Students all over the world are demanding relevancy in education. Another way of stating this is that students are no longer content with teaching but are demanding learning. One of the basic Santa Fe Community College commitments is that teaching occurs only when students learn. For too long students have been forced into being passive recipients of education.

Education has been a pouring into where the teacher gives facts and the student later returns these facts on an examination paper. Nevitt Sanford writes, "The time has come for us to control our zeal for imparting knowledge and skills and to concentrate our efforts on developing the individual student. By education for individual development, I mean a program consciously undertaken to promote an identity based on such qualities as flexibility, creativity, openness to experience and responsibility."

Sanford and others are saying that education must become a leading-out-of rather than a pouring-into. Education is a hear and now experience in which we focus on present realities and relate ourselves toward future possibilities for behaviors and decisions. It is a process that always occurs in dialogue between persons. It is a humanizing experience, rather than the accumulation of information.

Another one of the commitments at Santa Fe is that teaching must be exciting for both the teacher and the student. George B. Leonard in Education and Ecstasy wrote the following concerning moments of learning, "How many times do you remember? Something happens. A delicate warmth slides into parts of your being you didn't even realize were cold. The marrow of bones begin to thaw. You feel a little lurch as your consciousness, the teacher's voice, the entire webb of sound and silence that holds the class together, the room itself, the flow of time all shift to a different level and suddenly it is Christmas morning with students and teachers exhanging delightful gifts while bells silently chime; the old furniture around the room reflects a holiday gleam. Your classmate's eyes sparkle and snap like confetti and you realize with the certainty of music how rare and valuable each inhabitant has become, has always been. Or you find yourself trembling slightly with a terror and joy of knowledge, the immensity of existence and pattern and change. And when it ends and you must go, you reel from the room with flushed face, knowing you will never be the same. You have learned."

Many of the students who enter the community junior college have experienced years of dull unimaginative teaching. They are turned off to learning and it is the job of the faculty to turn them on by providing

a relevant, meaningful and exciting educational environment. Innovative and creative methods must be tried and the excitement of learning that can be found in the eyes of an elementary school child must be rekindled in the eyes of the community college student.

IV. Community colleges are providing planned strength bombardment and focus upon development of individual potential.

A consciously planned program that allows for a search for identity in relation to ones private perceptual world and the people in it seems to be an absolute necessity in an open-door community college. At Santa Fe Junior College we attempt to do this by providing a course called BE 100, The Individual In a Changing Environment. The subject matter of this course is the experience of the student--his values, attitudes, goals, beliefs, feelings, and abilities. All full-time counselors teach two sections of some 40 to 50 students each term utilizing the small group method--encounter groups, communications labs, sensitivity groups, T-groups are names commonly used to refer to this method. Students are encouraged to explore their feelings and behavior and to examine how they relate to others. The focus is upon the hear and now and students are taught direct and honest communication patterns--how to listen to others, how to express one's feelings in a way that is understood by others. The small group serves as a home base for students, a place where they can honestly search for their identity in a safe, secure environment. Long after a class is over you can see students together in their original small groups and you will see students time after time search out their counselor-teacher to talk with him.

On a community college campus where students commute to classes, it seems especially important to have a course of this nature. The community college has no dorms where students may talk until 2:00 A.M. It has no

place for students to take long walks together. Most students work and after class hurry to their jobs. Our students are in many ways innocent, some have been badly damaged by failure and deprivation experiences, many have low self concepts and generally feel pretty worthless as human beings. In these small groups success is assured, and with positive close human relationships, students begin to perceive themselves differently. The focus is upon development of potential rather than adjustment to the status quo, so it is different from the old "adjustment to college" courses. This process in which human beings come together to share parts of themselves not usually shared with others and to practice new forms of interpersonal relationships is perhaps the most significant aspect of the new humanistic approach to education. In a recent publication a junior college president wrote, "It is possible that the affective domain will hold the key to opening communication with students who have been damaged by previous educational experiences. They must be led to examine the way they feel about things. Such examination will open the way to evaluation and critical thinking. Then and only then there may be a chance for cognitive learning."

BE 100 is also unique in that it can be found at the very heart of the curriculum and along with five other courses, English, Math, Social Science, Science and Humanities, compose what is known as the common program at Santa Fe. This is Santa Fe's basic general education program and is designed to provide a core of experiences for all students regardless of ability and/or vocational choice. All courses in the common program are taught in sections of 25 students or less and teachers are carefully

selected for their human qualities as well as their intellectual knowledge. Lecturing is seldom used as a teaching technique. The workshop or project approach insures student involvement in these experiences designed as "turn-on" experiences. In the EH 100 classes diagnostic reading tests are administered to all students and if needed, students are referred to specialized clinics. In these learning laboratories, students may receive help on actual class projects and assignments, thus, any remedial work can be interesting and exciting to students.

V. Community colleges are providing well prepared student personnel workers fully immersed in the total college program.

While it is true that within any particular community college the entire community of educators contributes to the positive growth of students, it is also a reality that the responsibility for helping each student discover where he is, where he wants to go and how to travel there remains largely with the student personnel staff. Often the students first contact with the college comes through an admissions officer or a counselor and the "set" for a positive or negative attitude, the decision that this is a college that cares or does not care, is often established during this first contact. The uniqueness of the community junior college demands a unique and highly trained staff of student personnel helpers. Studies conducted by the American Association of Junior Colleges clearly denote the distinct nature of junior college student personnel programs as different from such programs in high school or four-year institutions.

Student personnel workers in open door institutions must assume an action posture if they are to fully contribute to meeting the needs of all students. They must be visible, not hidden away in some quiet office or a secluded part of the college campus. They must be in the business of attracting and seducing students so that students get a gleam in their

eye about the excitement of self-discovery and self-appreciation. They must take to the street, go into the student's environment--go where they are. They must also go into the environment of the instructors or teachers. In the years to come the cooperative efforts between student personnel and faculty will become of increasing importance in institutions with open admission policies.

VI. Community colleges recruit well-prepared creative teachers committed to the junior college philosophy.

Recruitment of master teachers is a major problem for any educational institution, but because of the uniqueness of community colleges, it is a critical area for these new institutions. Recruitment of teachers who believe in the worth and dignity of each individual and are able to express this belief through teaching is imperative. Teachers who believe that every student is gifted in some way and believe that every student has a rich potential to explore are ones who will help fulfill our mission of providing true educational experiences for all who enter our doors. Without this commitment to serve all, teachers will become frustrated in their efforts and will not provide a positive growth experience for students.

Community college teachers must be flexible, open people willing to risk and try new approaches to learning. They must be willing to question every traditional educational concept and willing to change their behavior when change is indicated. They must value the humanity of each man and except their mission of starting wherever a student might be and moving from there. Arbitrary group standards, arbitrary group grading practices and dull unimaginative teaching has no place in an open door community college. A humanized individual approach is clearly necessary for these institutions.

VII. Community colleges are providing meaningful involvement of students in the real life of the college.

In the open door community college, as in other institutions, students must be encouraged to become full partners in the educational process. They are the ones who will eventually bear the consequences of the quality of that process and they are the ones who can best evaluate the quality of their experiences. Students must be meaningfully involved in curriculum decisions, community life and teacher evaluations. Faculty and administrators must give students real responsibility and must not relegate student government to a sand-box organization.

In a sense, the college is the community and college and community interests and activities must be closely related. If this relationship exists, education will no longer be a thing to be completed, the accumulation of credits and amassing of degrees; rather, it will become a way of life, a style of living and becoming. The establishment of an open door inexpensive college with full curricula offerings that is an integral part of the community will go a long way toward extending educational opportunities to millions of Americans who have in the past found the door to higher education bolted.

In summary the community junior colleges are open admission colleges who accept all students regardless of past academic performance, economic status, age, sex or race. Concomitant with this commitment to educate all who desire to enter, community colleges are based upon the philosophies and procedures I have discussed. Open admissions costs money and sometimes costs egos. Both are cheap compared to the needs of our society. If the community junior college can succeed in providing meaningful educational experiences for the plurality of humanity that enters its open door then no one will doubt its claim to uniqueness.